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Unfortunately, I Could Not Record in Ostrava

Ludek Drizhal, Czech born Composer living in Hollywood talked to Karel Balcar of *Pravo Daily Newspaper*-Prague, Czech Republic

K.B. Between March and April you were recording your score in Bratislava with the Bratislava Radio Symphony for an upcoming American film Rounding First directed by Jim Fleigner. Why did you choose Bratislava?

L.D. There are quite a few American films that I have seen in the past that were recorded overseas. It seems that every third film that I have seen in the past few months had its score recorded in Prague. I went on the internet and I searched through a number of European orchestras, and I found out that Bratislava was even better prized than Prague. I thought to myself that since I come from Czechoslovakia, that I could try to contribute in a small way to the economy (particularly considering the fact that Slovak people are some of the lowest paid in the European Union). For one day of work, they received \$100 Dollars, which is not a great amount of money (in comparison to American musicians), but it's considerably more than they would make if they just played a concert.

K.B. How satisfied were you with the quality of Slovak musicians?

L.D. I was very pleased with the quality and professionalism of the players. I was also impressed with the equipment of the studio. They were using only the highest end equipment (mics, preamps, board etc.) as well as the latest version of ProTools. To tell the truth, to keep the budget low I even looked at Ostrava, but unfortunately Ostrava does not have equipment that would meet the (minimum) standard in order to allow me to bring a perfect recording back to Los Angeles and be able to mix it with great ease. Bratislava was far more advanced in that regard.

K.B. How did you end up in the United States?

L.D. Well, the short version is that I was born in 1966 in Karvina (Northern Moravia). Shortly after my parents divorced, my mother moved to Germany in 1968 and after the borders between East and West closed, we were separated for 18 years. She later moved to the U.S. where she has been living for the past several decades. I came to visit her when she was getting married in 1985, and this was the first time I saw her since I was 2 years old (obviously I did not remember much from those days) but I was too overwhelmed with America to stay. I returned back to Prague after a month.

K.B. What happened then?

L.D. Funny you should ask, I was drafted. The irony was that my mother already worked for the U.S. Airforce, at the same time when I entered in the Warsaw Pact Army as a private. In my case, as the result of this situation I elevated the bar for hazing many times over. Hazing became an everyday occurrence. When the situation became unbearable, I came to the conclusion that the only way I can make it is if I try to get out of the Army and escape to the U.S. The fear of two years of physical and mental abuse moved me to call my mother. I explained my situation and asked her for help to get me out of the country. I made sure that she knew that I was very serious this time.

K.B. How did you find your place in America?

L.D. When I moved to the U.S. I continued to write music. I lived in Washington D.C. for about 10 months and then I moved to Austin, Texas where I lived and worked for 13 great years. I was a songwriter and a studio musician.

K.B. I understand that you also studied in America?

L.D. The breaking point for me came after the death of my father in 1993. I came to a conclusion that things were not progressing as quickly in my career as I would have liked them to. It was because I had entrusted too many wrong people with controlling my career. Instead of doing things myself, I allowed too many other folks to dictate my every move. I decided to go back to school and study music at the University of Texas at Austin. There I studied violin and conducting. Then I was awarded a teaching assistantship to the very prestigious University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles. After I finished my studies I was very fortunate to be offered a part-time position at the University. During my studies there I began working on some independent and short films, while I also worked on a large orchestral piece based on poetry and pictures of children who died in Terezin concentration camp. That took about a year of my life.

K.B. Thank you for your time and congratulations on your success.

L.D. Thank you, it was my pleasure.

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